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HIV/HEPATITIS C CO-INFECTION

What you should know:

- Both HIV and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) are transmitted by exposure to infected blood;
- It is estimated that 50 to 80 percent of injection drug users (IDUs) who are HIV positive also have HCV infection;
- HCV can cause serious liver damage;
- HCV affects approximately 600,000 people, or two percent of California's population;
- Symptoms (jaundice, fatigue, abdominal bloating, and flu-like illness) associated with HCV infection are present in only 20 to 30 percent of acute cases; therefore, most infections go undiagnosed until liver disease develops 20 to 30 years later.
- Liver disease from HCV is now the leading non-AIDS cause of death in the United States in individuals co-infected with HIV;
- HCV is regarded as an opportunistic infection in people with HIV infection, although it is not considered an AIDS-defining illness;

What we are doing:

In 2003, California Department of Health Services, Office of AIDS (CDHS/OA) conducted a demonstration project to evaluate the use of HCV counseling and testing (C&T) as an incentive to attract larger numbers of IDUs in HIV C&T. Results found that:

- HIV testing rates among IDUs nearly doubled when HIV C&T was offered in conjunction with HCV C&T;
- HIV test disclosure return rates increased by 21 percent among IDUs when individuals were able to receive both their HCV and HIV test results; and
- IDUs were more interested in their HCV status than their HIV status.

In 2004, as a result of the demonstration project, CDHS/OA implemented the *Injection Drug User HIV Counseling and Testing Utilizing HCV Screening High-Risk Initiative* in 24 local health jurisdictions (LHJs). The intent of the Initiative is to better understand how alternative approaches, including incentives, influence the number of IDUs who enter into HIV C&T programs in California. The Initiative's objective is to increase the number of IDUs who receive HIV C&T, by:

- *Primary goal* – offering HCV screening in coordination with HIV C&T.
- *Secondary goal* - integrating HCV testing into HIV C&T to increase the number of IDUs who know their HCV status, and receive appropriate HCV prevention; and link infected persons to HCV care services.

Data collected from the Initiative will help LHJs to better understand HCV infection rates and related risk behaviors in their respective jurisdictions. Such knowledge can also assist county and state health officials to better address the prevention, treatment, and funding needs among IDUs related to HCV and HIV infection.



Helpful resources:

- For more information on OA's mission, OA programs, and other helpful resources, see Website <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/AIDS>.
- For information about HIV/AIDS, call the:
 - *California AIDS Hotline* at (800) 367-AIDS (English/Spanish/Filipino) or (888) 225-AIDS (TDD) or see Website <http://www.AIDShotline.org>.
- For more Internet resources see the following Websites:
 - <http://www.hcvadvocate.org>.
 - <http://www.liverfoundation.org>.
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/idu>.